

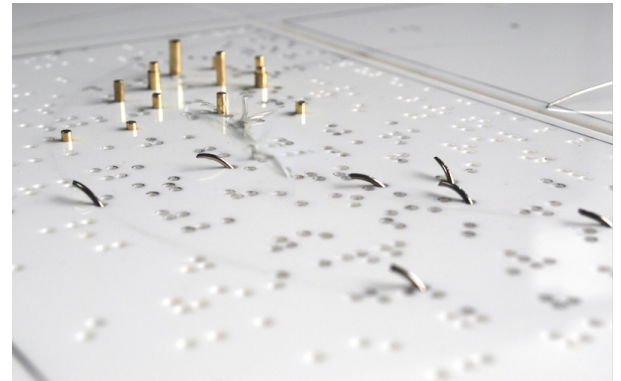


The Internal Machine

by Tom McGlynn

THE CENTER FOR BOOK ARTS | OCTOBER 6 – DECEMBER 16, 2017

The modern book is the product of a mechanical operation, the printing press, but as *Internal Machine* suggests, it can be considered a mechanism in and of itself. For instance, think of the way the reader virtually inserts him or herself into a book which becomes a vehicle for emotional, philosophical and theoretical transportation. This carefully considered show puts one in just such a vehicle, situating the viewer in a playfully discursive topology of a cut-away and exploded view.



Mary Ziegler, *Babel*, detail, 2017.

The curator, John Roach, has put together sixteen artists whose reconsideration of the book ranges from the manic scrapbook to the mechanically-reproduced codex. In choosing such a range of contextual possibilities, he transmits the idea that the “reading” of any text isn’t necessarily an open and shut case. A deep reader discovers that they are involved in a continual generation of meaning, just as any author knows that the process of writing can facilitate the discovery of connections between otherwise unrelated things. The moving parts of this idea (as well as the moving targets within its range) make for a wild ride of a show. Its metacognitive point seems to be that books, like our brains, can contain a multitude of different operating instructions, and that an ability to reverse engineer any given meaning of a book can move us closer to a more finely-tuned mechanics of mind.

The room of the exhibit is taken up, from floor to ceiling, with an immersive display of free-standing and wall works. It is as if one is enveloped in the brain box of a wildly inventive mind, entertaining multiple disparate thought-tangents at once. Gillian Brown’s *Creationes ex Machina* (2017) is a continuous scroll, hung eccentrically from the ceiling, connected to a large inkjet printer. The scroll is crammed with cosmological figures which would be at home in a medieval manuscript. Marshall McLuhan’s study of ancient scribal cultures in contrast to the multi-platform “Gutenberg Galaxy” we now navigate comes to mind. And this mill of symbols exemplifies how the evolution of reproductive technology—from the scribe to the press to the digital printer—often offers more information than one can readily assimilate. In a similar vein, Ward Shelley and Douglas Paulson’s *Archive Library v. I*, (2012) sets up a barely-controlled system of correlating fake books with fictional archives. This is comically drawn out, with oil and toner on

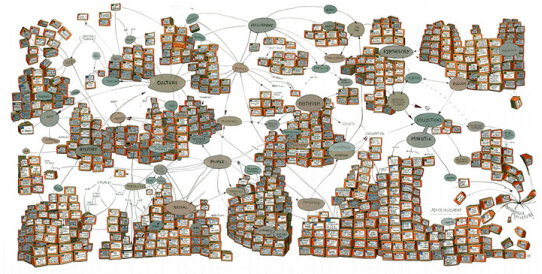
Mylar, in precariously stacked boxes which seem to fall over themselves trying to remain in their assigned places.

András Böröcz enters the realm of the bizarre with his *Book Machine* (2008), a combination book and bookshelf containing a Rube Goldberg contraption of delicately-crafted and scaled down swim fins operated by paper clips strung up with wire through tin funnels. The fact that there's no logical relation between the items comprising this primitive machine reinforces one of the show's subplots: the surreal absurdity of a straight reading of any book. Another such piece is Arnaldo Morales's *Bizcocho No. 09* (2016) in which eight metal tendrils flail about upon pressing a red "panic" button in the center of an aluminum case that refers to protective luggage. Purposefully crafted to mimic a high-tech carrying system (of the kind a professional photographer might use for equipment), its ultimate purposelessness counteracts any official use value. If it were a book it might be a modern vignette of blind administration by some contemporary Kafka. Brian Dettmer configures his shallow, yet intricate, sculptures from found volumes. His *Do It Complete Yourself Man* (2010) is a razor sharp dissection of a domestic "how to" book whose "vertiginous symmetries" (to quote one of the most imaginative bibliophiles of all time, Jorge Luis Borges) trap one in a Piranesi-like prison of interior forms. Of a more mystically empirical bent is a work by Alexander Rosenberg, *Hyperpyrexia* (2014–2017). Correlating a rise in body heat with dissociative states of mind, Rosenberg's lab setup of beakers and pipettes literally distill texts having to do with febrile phenomena into fluid filled lenses that are then used to read the following passage to be distilled. By hearkening to an alchemical process of literal transformation, the artist physicalizes the fundamental (and in this case heated) act of absorbing a text. Mary Ziegler's *Babel*, (2017) is more likely suited for a contemporary lab. Its complex interaction of diminutive parentheses and brass periods—animated by a magnet rotating hidden beneath the punctured outline of a book in Braille—offers a fascinating analogy of tactile thought. Our brain is a thing after all, and there is something remarkably tender about how the tiny bits of metal worm, leapfrog, and piston in and out of the Braille holes, like player piano notes of the mind.



András Boröcz, *Book Machine*, 2008.

One of the larger installations is Benjamin Wright's *Vivisection* (2017) which fills almost an entire corner of this already clamorous show. It is perhaps the most free-associative of the works on view, assembled as it is from magazine clippings, cut-outs from vintage prints, large and small speaker units, various lights and their eccentric wirings and many other two-and-three-dimensional forms. It would be impossible to classify all of its forms into one coherent volume, but that seems to be the presiding spirit of the show which is, as Wright puts it in the show's catalogue, "to nurture the seeds of narrative into generative thought." In embodying that process, *The Internal Machine* creates an eccentric assembly line of thought vehicles that can take you virtually anywhere you want to go.



Ward Shelly and Douglas Paulson, *Archive Library v.I*, 2012.

CONTRIBUTOR

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TOM MCGLYNN is an artist, writer, and independent curator based in the N.Y.C. area. His work is represented in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Cooper- Hewitt National Design Museum of the Smithsonian. He is the director of Beautiful Fields, an organization dedicated to socially-engaged curatorial projects, and is also currently a visiting lecturer at Parsons/the New School.

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Joseph Salvatore, *Books Editor*, *books*

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Rendition

by Benjamin Gottlieb

DEC 16-JAN 17 | ART BOOKS

To mark the end of the year, the *Rail's* Art Books editors, Ben Gottlieb, Phillip Griffith, and Greg Lindquist, and Managing Director Sara Christoph each selected a notable book from the past year to share with our readers. This is not a list of the *best* books of the year. Instead, it is an informal survey meant to highlight the diversity of art book publishing now.



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by Megan N. Liberty

JUNE 2017 | ART BOOKS

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